

## **Castles of Poitou and the Charentes:** Outline Itinerary (may be subject to minor changes)

All breakfasts are included and 3 group evening meals

All transport by coach within the itinerary is included as well as entrance fees

Introductions to the sites will be given by Richard Eales or Pamela Marshall

### Day 1: **Weds** 19th June.

Participants should make their own way to Poitiers. [There is a large mainline station at Poitiers and a Ryanair flight from London Stansted leaves at 12.30 arriving 15.00. It is a short taxi ride from the airport to the hotel and there will no doubt be other participants to share taxis.]

No specific group time has been scheduled in Poitiers within the itinerary, but participants are encouraged to see the following in the course of their stay, all of which are within walking distance of the hotel. The churches stay open quite late in June, but check opening hours for the first 3 sites listed):

- 12thC Grande Salle of the palace of the Dukes of Aquitaine - now in the Palais de Justice. Free entry to the public (after a security check) during normal office hours, although from time to time it is closed without notice because of events within the offices. Also the Maubergeon Tower from the same palace complex - external view only from a public garden. (Note also the fortified wall.)
- Baptistery of St Jean
- Museum of Ste Croix
- Romanesque church of Notre Dame la Grande
- Romanesque church of St Hilaire
- Church of Ste Radegonde
- Cathedral of St Pierre
- Church of St Porchaire

19.00 Group to gather at Hotel de L'Europe, Poitiers, for a group evening meal at a nearby restaurant.

### Day 2: **Thursday** 20th June (Vienne) : Chauvigny and St-Savin

9.00 Depart (25km; 40 mins) for visit to Chauvigny [including time for lunch].

10.00 Gouzon donjon - enter as group - now also a museum. This historic town also has the Château Baronnial; Château de Harcourt; Tour de Flins and 2 Romanesque churches

14.30 Depart for Abbaye St-Savin (20km; 25 mins), which is a UNESCO site with extraordinary frescoes.

16.30 Return to Poitiers for some free time to see those unscheduled sites.

Overnight Poitiers

### Day 3: **Friday** 21st June (Vienne):Grand-Pressigny/La Roche-Posay/ Angles-sur-l'Anglin

8.45 Depart for Château de Grand-Pressigny - arrive for opening time (10.00) - (68K: 1hr.15) 13thC enceinte with towers and gatehouse and (half of) a 12thC donjon. 17thC buildings house a museum of prehistory.

11.30 depart for La Roche-Posay - (20k: 20 mins). Romanesque donjon; fortified church; town defences of 12th-14thC. Time for lunch.

14.00 depart for Angles Sur l'Anglin - (13k: 15 mins). Picturesque ruined castle with good remains from 12th-15thC.

16.00 Return to Poitiers (48km; 1 hour) for some free time.

Overnight Poitiers

### Day 4: **Saturday** 22nd June (heavy day) (Deux-Sèvres):

#### Coudray-Salbart/ Niort / Cherveux/ Parthenay

08.45: Leave Poitiers for Coudray-Salbart (76km; 1 hour) arrive 9.45 for 10.00 opening. Impressive castle of early 13thC and later.

11.15 depart for Niort (12km; 20 mins) 11.45 - 13.00 Visit Plantagenet château with double donjon complex. Break for lunch in Niort.

14.00 Depart for Château de Cherveux (15km; 20 mins) to arrive at 15.00 opening. Early Renaissance château.

16.30 Depart for Parthenay (31km; 35 mins) Walking tour of medieval town defences.

18.30 Return to Poitiers (53k; 1 hr. 15)

Overnight Poitiers

## Day 5: Sunday 23rd June (Deux-Sèvres / Charente) - probably needs a packed lunch:

09.00 Depart Poitiers for Château-Larcher 23k (30 mins): Unusual survival of Lanterne des Morts in cemetery; Romanesque fortified church with 14thC round tower; ruined *enceinte* of 13th-15thC.  
11.30 On to Gençay (10k; 15 mins) Exterior view only of impressive 13thC *enceinte*.  
12.30 On to St. Germain de Confolens (48k; 50 mins). Ruined castle (open site) with 15thC flanking towers and Romanesque chapel.  
14.00 On to La Rochefoucauld 47k (50 mins) - arrive 15.00. Mostly a big Renaissance pile but medieval parts, including remains of an impressive donjon.  
17.30 Carry on to Angoulême. Check in at Hotel de l'Européen.  
20.00 Group meal in local restaurant.  
Overnight Angoulême

## Day 6: Monday 24th June (Charente)

Morning on foot in Angoulême.  
Cathedral of St Pierre. City defences. Free time.  
13.00 Depart for Villebois-Lavalette (25km; 40 mins) arriving around 13.40: impressive village *halle* and visit to high-status château of 12th-17thC.  
15.30 Depart for Aubeterre (30km; 40 mins) for visit to large and unusual rock-cut church dating originally from early Christian era to supplant a Roman Mithraeum. In the small town one can see vestiges of the castle (exterior view only), which was linked to the church by a rock-cut tunnel. Also a pilgrim church with fine Romanesque carvings over the west door depicting St. James mounted for battle.  
18.00 Depart for Angoulême (48km; 1 hour)  
Overnight Angoulême

## Day 7: Tuesday 25th June (Charente/ Charente-Maritime):

Check out at Angoulême:  
9.00 Depart for Pons (44km; 55 mins): 10.00 visit Romanesque donjon.  
11.30 Depart for Talmont-sur-Gironde (33km; 45 mins) beautifully sited bastide with Romanesque church (UNESCO). Includes lunch stop.  
14.30 Depart for Broué St Sornin (40km; 50 mins) Remains of neglected but impressive donjon. Possibility of seeing ruined Château of St Jean d'Angle of 12thC (?) if it's not too dangerous.  
On to Saintes (33km; 40 mins). Check in at Hotel des Messageries.  
Overnight Saintes

## Day 8: Wednesday 26th June (Charente-Maritime)

Leave 08.30 for Surgères (55km; 50 mins). Walking tour of very large 12thC walled enclosure.  
10.30 depart for La Rochelle (42km; 45 mins).  
11.30 Visit 3 Towers in La Rochelle harbour (Saint Nicholas; Chain Tower: Lantern Tower), then free time in the port.  
14.30 Return to Saintes - central city of the Saintonge region, which gave its name to a form of 14thC pottery much-imported into England.  
15.30 Walking tour will take in group visit to Roman amphitheatre.  
Then at your own pace this afternoon and Thursday morning there is much to see in Saintes: remains of Gallo-Roman rampart and baths; Arch of Germanicus; magnificent Romanesque basilica of St Eutrope (and its crypt); Romanesque church and nunnery of Abbaye aux Dames. For those willing to undertake a reasonable walk to the outskirts of the town there are also the impressive remains of the Roman aqueduct to explore.  
Farewell group dinner in the evening at a local restaurant.

## Day 9: Thursday 27th June (Charente-Maritime)

Group disperses.  
NB. There is a mainline station at Saintes.  
For those taking a flight back to the UK from La Rochelle, communal transport can be arranged with a local minibus. This will entail a 12.00 departure to be sure of arrival at La Rochelle Airport at 13.30. (This will be at extra cost for those who need it). A Ryanair flight is available from La Rochelle to Stansted (the nearest airport: NB none on WEDS OR FRI) The 15.30 departure is probably the most convenient timing to arrive back in the UK at 16.00  
Cost: Shared room £1,175pp (€1,350pp) Single room: £1,465 (€1,685)